




DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH POLICY/PROCEDURE

SUBJECT	POLICY NO.	EFFECTIVE DATE	PAGE
CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA	611.03	09/30/2003	1 of 4
APPROVED BY:  Director	SUPERSEDES 611.3 09/30/2003	ORIGINAL ISSUE DATE	DISTRIBUTION LEVEL(S) 1

PURPOSE

- 1.1 To ensure timely and appropriate response to media inquiries while protecting information deemed by law to be private and confidential.

POLICY

- 2.1 In accordance with policy established by the Board of Supervisors that supports openness in County government, priority shall be given to requests for public information from the media. Unnecessary delays by Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) staff in responding to the media should not be imposed by supervisory and/or management staff or by the Public Information Officer.
- 2.2 This policy does not apply to media requests for independent expert opinion and views from staff on matters outside the realm of County business in areas where the staff, by virtue of their training and/or professional discipline, is considered an independent expert.
- 2.3 Only that information defined as "Public Records" in the California State Government Code, Section 6252(d) may be released without consent from affected parties, including clients. These include information related to the conduct of the public's business that are prepared, owned, used or retained by LACDMH regardless of physical form or characteristic.
 - 2.3.1 LACDMH staff is not ordinarily required to prepare or develop documents beyond those that already exist nor are they required to prepare analyses of existing documents.
- 2.4 Documents exempt from disclosure under California law include:



DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH POLICY/PROCEDURE

SUBJECT	POLICY NO.	EFFECTIVE DATE	PAGE
CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA	611.03	09/30/2003	2 of 4

- 2.4.1 Information pertaining to voluntary or involuntary recipients of specified services, including mental health, community mental health, admissions and judicial commitments and mental institutions;
 - 2.4.2 Personnel, medical or similar files, the disclosure of which would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. (California State Government Code, Section 6254(e));
 - 2.4.3 Certain records relating to test questions, scoring keys and other examination data. (California State Government Code, Section 6254(g)); and
 - 2.4.4 Records pertaining to pending litigation to which LACDMH is a party, or the work product of an attorney, or information that falls under the attorney-client privilege. (California State Government Code, Sections 6254 and 6254.25)
- 2.5 In the event a person receiving voluntary or involuntary mental health services from LACDMH or its contractor agencies chooses to participate in responding to media inquiries, staff are required to obtain a prior signed Consent to Photograph/Audio Record (Attachment 1) as well as a prior signed Authorization for Use or Disclosure of Protected Health Information (Attachment 2) from the person or his/her legal guardian before endorsing or facilitating such participation.

PROCEDURE

- 3.1 Staff may respond to routine media inquiries regarding issues relevant to LACDMH operations that are in areas of their expertise but with the consent of their District Chief and/or Deputy Director. Staff are required to consult with the Department's Public Information Officer prior to providing media with any information. Immediately following a response, staff should complete a Notice of Press Contact (Attachment 3) and fax it to the Public Information Officer. The Public Information Officer will inform the Chief Deputy Director of the reported media contact.
- 3.2 Requests for information outside an individual's area of expertise or of a politically sensitive nature must be referred to the Public Information Officer.



DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH POLICY/PROCEDURE

SUBJECT	POLICY NO.	EFFECTIVE DATE	PAGE
CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA	611.03	09/30/2003	3 of 4

LACDMH personnel shall promptly provide information upon request from the Public Information Officer to enable a timely response. When needed, the Public Information Officer shall work with the Chief Administrative Office's Public Affairs Office and/or County Counsel's Office to determine the propriety of releasing the requested document/information. Items expected to generate considerable and/or controversial media attention will be communicated by the Public Information Officer to the Chief Administrative Office's Public Affairs Office and the Chief Deputy Director.

- 3.3 Following approval by the appropriate District Chief, staff will provide relevant written information needed for all necessary press releases directly to the Public Information Officer to finalize as a press release. The Public Information Officer, in consultation with staff, shall develop a final copy of the press release within five (5) working days of the date the information is received by the Public Information Officer. The Public Information Officer shall distribute the press release to relevant media, after approval by the appropriate Deputy Director.

APPEAL PROCESS

- 4.1 Representatives from the media who believe they have been denied access to a public document may appeal, in writing, to

LACDMH Chief Deputy Director
550 S. Vermont Ave., 12th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90020

The Director of Mental Health is the final appeal authority within the Department. The Board of Supervisors' adopted policy designates the Chief Administrative Office's Public Affairs Office as the Board's representative in resolving disputes between the media and the Department.

AUTHORITY

Board Order No. 94 (April 2, 2002)
California State Government Code Sections 6252(d), 6254(e), 6254(g), and 6254.25
Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 5328



**LAC
DMH**
LOS ANGELES COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH POLICY/PROCEDURE

SUBJECT	POLICY NO.	EFFECTIVE DATE	PAGE
CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA	611.03	09/30/2003	4 of 4

ATTACHMENT

1. [Consent to Photograph/Audio Record](#)
2. [Authorization for Use or Disclosure of Protected Health Information](#)
3. [Notice of Press Contact](#)

REVIEW DATE

This policy shall be reviewed on or before October 2008.